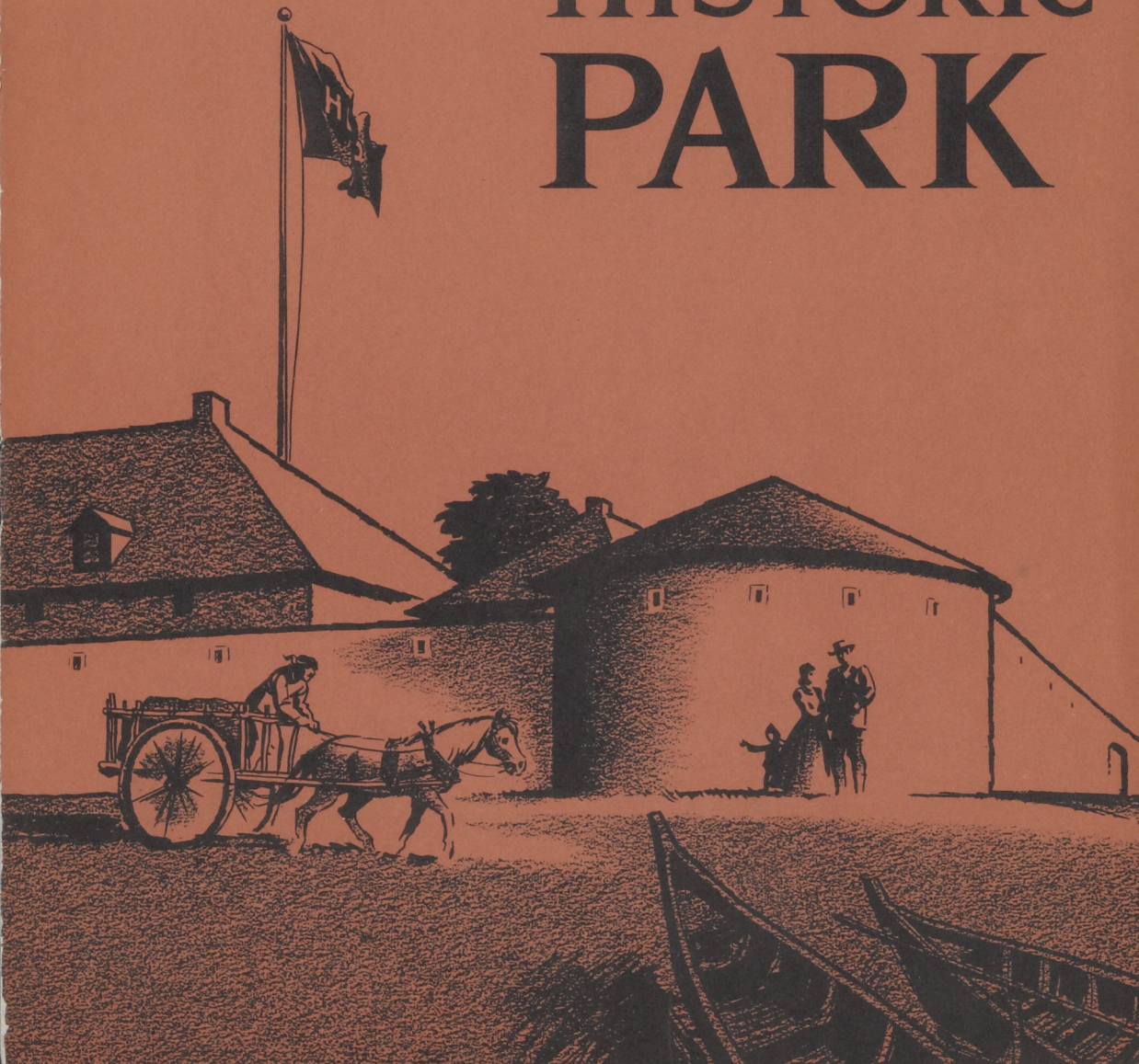
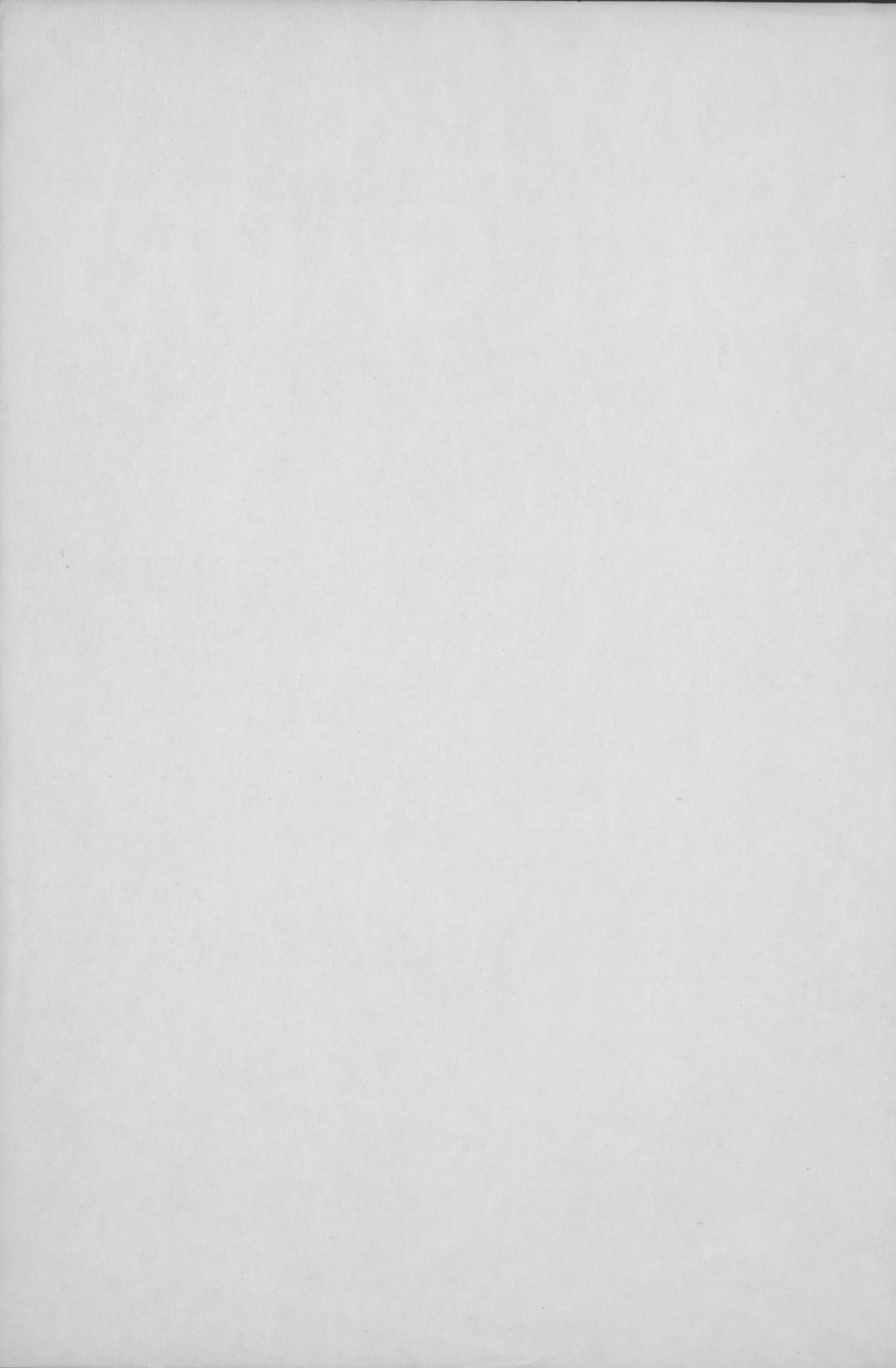


LOWER FORT GARRY

NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK





LOWER FORT GARRY

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LOWER FORT GARRY

*I*n the autumn of 1831 a grand new fort of stone was being built on the west bank of the Red River at the foot of St. Andrew's Rapids.

An improvised gang of workmen toiled on the construction. Some were young Scots and Englishmen, apprentices new to the Northwest whose romantic visions of the fur-trade were dimming after almost a year of dull routine work at warehouse desks and counters. Others were old hands, laid-off temporarily from their normal freighting work on the northern rivers or transferred from less useful duties. Like any other large organization, the Hudson's Bay Company in the 1830's had its "supernumeraries" and when its top Canadian executive, George Simpson, decided to build "the most respectable looking establishment in the Indian Country" it was efficient to make up a construction gang from this surplus labour force.

Efficiency and economy had been the watchwords of company operations since 1822 when 35-year old George Simpson, a London clerk with only two years of fur-trading experience, became Governor of the Northern Department, that sprawling fur-trade district that included York and Churchill Factories, the entire Northwest and the Pacific Slope. Simpson's great job was to impose order on the

The surviving roofed bastion of the fort. The four bastions of Lower Fort Garry were never used for military defence, serving instead as bakery, powder magazine, wash-house, cookhouse, storage space or icehouse. The other three bastions no longer have roofs.



unwieldy organization that had resulted from the union of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821; to reconcile the rival factions and to enlist both Gentleman Adventurer and Nor'wester in a common cause; to exploit the advantages of a complete monopoly position by good management and strict discipline.

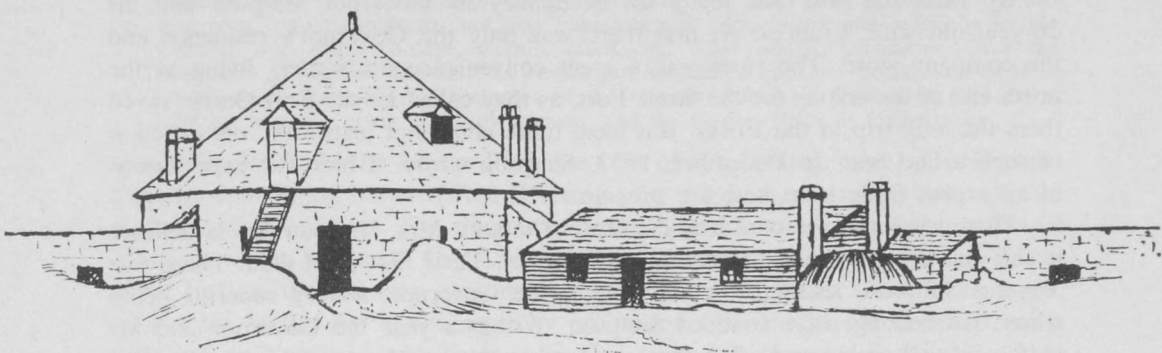
The company had picked the man for the job. Simpson was an unknown clerk in his uncle's firm in London when Andrew Colvile, the senior partner and also a director of the Hudson's Bay Company, recommended him for the position of Governor of Rupert's Land. The governor-designate learned the way of the trade in the Athabasca Department then took over the Northern Department. When William Williams, the governor of the smaller and less important Southern Department, retired in 1826, Simpson became in fact the governor of all the territories, an authority that was formally confirmed by his appointment as Governor-in-Chief of Rupert's Land in 1839. He held this position until his death at Lachine in 1860.

Though Simpson's powers were limited by the active supervision of the Governor and Committee at London he had their complete confidence. While the company was governed from London Simpson governed in Canada, putting his superiors' policies into effect and reporting back to them all aspects of the operations. His tact and strength of personality overcame the dissent and rancorous factionalism among the company's employees. His strict discipline and impersonal administration welded the traders into a loyal and efficient organization and his excellent business management made his term the most successful period the company had known. The dividends increased—four per cent in 1822, ten per cent and a bonus of ten per cent in 1825—and until the introduction of the silk hat in the 1840's forced restriction of the beaver take, the company was remarkably prosperous.

Fort Garry, built in 1822 at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine, was the centre for all the diverse elements that made up the Red River settlement. There were the Kildonan Scots, the Irish, the French, the Swiss, and the French-Canadians who made up the Selkirk settlement, and the French-speaking Métis or half-breeds. More settlers were coming in; French and English-speaking half-breeds from the overpopulated former North West Company posts, retiring company officers with their Indian or half-breed wives. The Forks was the melting-pot of western society and Fort Garry, as Alexander Ross described it in 1825, "the metropolis of the country. . . a few wooden houses huddled together without palisades or any regard to taste or even comfort".

In 1826 a severe flood ravaged the settlement and poor Fort Garry, roughly constructed of wood, suffered irreparably. It was almost washed away and when the waters receded it was discovered that its foundations were weakened. To replace it Simpson decided to build the new fort on the Red River 20 miles above the forks.

Other considerations governed Simpson's decision to build a replacement for Fort Garry. The site was at the head of navigation, making it possible for the York boats travelling to and from the northern posts via the Red River and Lake Winnipeg to avoid the difficult passage through St. Andrew's Rapids to the Forks. There was also the presence of the half-breeds at the Forks, a troublesome lot



The south-west bastion of the fort as it appeared to an artist in 1847.

harbouring old resentments against settlers; the new fort would be far enough away to reduce their contribution to the social tensions of the community and to eliminate their potential threat to the peace. Another important, though less obvious, reason for the establishment of the post on the new site was Simpson's hope of encouraging agricultural enterprise.

It had been the intention of Lord Selkirk to develop his Red River Colony so that it could provide products for export as well as provisions for the Hudson's Bay Company posts. Although his settlers made some progress at developing agriculture to supply provisions to the fur posts the search for an exportable product was a failure. An idea of exporting buffalo wool to England was put into effect by the executors of Lord Selkirk's estate after the peer's death and the Hudson's Bay Company reluctantly financed the scheme but there was no market for buffalo wool in England.

Simpson carried on Selkirk's ideas. He knew that the colony had undeveloped economic potential, that its settlers with little effort could provide more than enough provisions for the posts. His search for an export product was based on sound economics. The only money circulating in the colony was that paid by the company to the settlers for provisions and to its employees in wages, and much of that was spent on imports from Great Britain and therefore passed out of the country. Unless exports were developed to provide a source of revenue the settlers might resort to free-trading in furs and covert commercial dealing with American traders.

The most promising export products were tallow, wool, flax and hemp and in 1830 the company established an experimental farm on the Assiniboine three miles from the Forks to produce these articles. The new Fort Garry was intended to be part of this agricultural operation. It could serve as a shipping depot and its importance would increase as the new agricultural industries spread from the company farm to the lands of the Red River settlers.

According to Winnipeg writer Margaret Arnett MacLeod, the builder of the Lower Fort was Pierre LeBlanc, an experienced craftsman from York Factory whom Simpson had brought to Red River. The stonework was built in later years by Duncan McRae, a stone mason from the Hebrides.

By 1832 the post was ready for occupancy by Governor Simpson and his 20-year-old wife, Frances. At first there was only the Governor's residence and the company store. The store was a great convenience for settlers living at the north end of the colony for the Stone Fort, as they called Lower Fort Garry, saved them the long trip to the Forks. But local trade could not justify the construction of such a fine post. In December, 1833, Simpson wrote "I fear our expectations of an export trade from here are premature."

There were also personal tragedies and irritations. Mrs. Simpson was in delicate health and unhappy in the Red River Settlement. Their first child died. There was Thomas Simpson, secretary and cousin to the Governor, a very superior being whose patronizing ways annoyed Simpson. Within a year the Governor and his lady went to London and when they returned made their home at Lachine.

The Stone Fort did not last long as the chief post and headquarters of the Assiniboia district. The Forks was the point where the grain trade and agricultural economy along the Red and fur trade of the regions to the west converged. The residents around the Stone Fort were sedentary prosperous farmers while near the Forks lived the main body of the Métis, the freighters and hunters who were more useful in the company's operations. To counteract the Métis predilection for roving, the company had encouraged the establishment of a Roman Catholic mission at St. Boniface and favored making the Forks a stable community where the half-breeds could settle down. The Stone Fort was too far off the beaten track to stand by itself. In 1835 Upper Fort Garry was rebuilt on higher ground to combat the floods. From then on the Stone Fort, or Lower Fort Garry to distinguish it from the Upper fort, functioned mainly as a supplementary post. It was concerned with agriculture and freighting by boat and had a store which conducted a flourishing business in cash and barter.

H. M. Robinson in his "The Great Fur Land or Sketches of Life in the Hudson's Bay Territory" (1879) writes of the store:

"The sales-room is a square apartment, with no attempt at ornament, no plaster, the ceiling merely the joists and flooring of the second flat, thickly studded with nails and hooks, from which are suspended various articles of trade. Along the side walls are box shelves, nearly two feet deep. On the floor within the counter are piled bales of goods, bundles of prints, hardware, etc.; and this space within the counter comprises almost the entire room. A small area is railed off near the door sufficiently large to hold twenty standing customers. When this is filled, the remaining patrons must await their turn in the courtyard; and it is not at all an unusual sight to see from fifty to one hundred people standing quietly about outside until their time comes to be served. The best goods of all manufacturers alone are sold here. No shoddy or inferior goods are ever imported or sold by the company. Everything is purchased direct from producers, and of a stipulated quality. The principal articles of trade are tea, sugar, calico, blankets, ammunition, fishing-gear, and a kind of cloth, very thick and resembling blanketing, called duffle. Coffee is rarely sold, and green tea is almost unknown, the black only being used. Raw spirits are sold to a large extent in the posts immediately contiguous to settlements. . . .

"Amidst this stock of merchandise, composed in so great a part of staple articles, may be found, nevertheless, an assortment of dress goods and gewgaws over a century old—old-time ruffs, stomachers, caps and what not; garments of antique cut and trim, articles of vertu, and apparel long since out of vogue are mixed up in a heterogeneous mass. What a day of delights and surprises would it prove to the ladies of the present age to toss and tumble all that collection of decayed finery! Yet, doubtless, much would be found apropos to the reigning fashions; for here, too, may be purchased the latest styles of wear upon Cheapside and Regent's Park—kid gloves at fabulously low prices;

made-up silks, Parisian bonnets, delicate foot gear, etc., with near neighbours of huge iron pots, copper cauldrons, and iron implements of grim aspect and indefinite weight, together with ships' cordage, oakum, pitch, and other marine necessities. Over this dispensary of needfuls and luxuries presides an accountant and two clerks, none of them gotten up in the elaborate costumes of the counter-waiters of civilization, but rather affecting buckskin coats, corduroy trousers, and the loudest styles of flannel shirts. . . ."

In the fur-trade the Lower Fort was one of the landing places for the boat brigades commuting between Red River and the northern posts with their cargoes of furs and provisions. The despatch of the brigades was one of the principal functions of the Hudson's Bay Company establishments in the Red River Settlement. In June the brigades, each made up of four to six 34-foot-long York boats, set out for Methy Portage where they exchanged their outfits for furs and made their way to Norway House, some returning to Red River with goods and others taking the furs to York Factory and loading there with goods for Norway House and Red River. In early fall other brigades carried the furs of Red River and Rainy Lake districts to York Factory and returned with supplies. Each of these heavy York boats carried about three tons of cargo, a load that justified their slow passage.

In 1846 the first military garrison came to Red River as a result of the dispute between Britain and the United States over the location of the border of Oregon Territory on the Pacific Coast. If war came British troops would be needed to hold Red River from American attack and support the defence of British interests in Oregon. However it was the defence of Hudson's Bay Company interests in Red



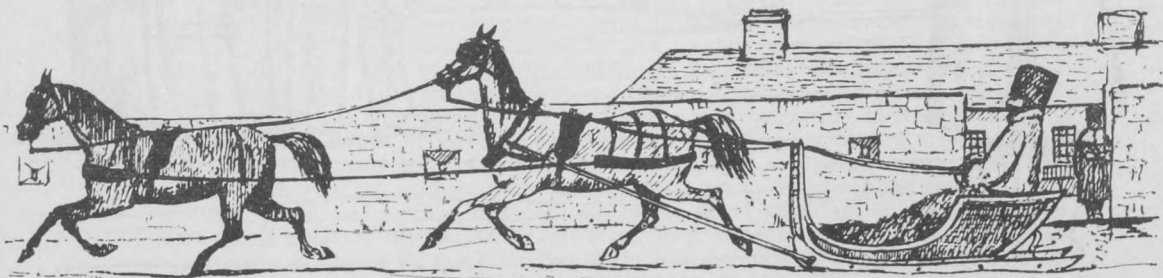
Officers and sentry in winter dress at the fort.

River that occupied Sir George Simpson. To him the Oregon boundary dispute was fortuitous for it provided a convincing reason for stationing British soldiers as a deterrent to the Métis troublemakers of the colony who lately had been getting out of control. Only three days after the troopship left Ireland for York Factory news of the settlement of the Oregon dispute reached London but it was two years before the troops were recalled.

During those two years the British troops—about 350 all ranks, mainly the 6th Royal Regiment of Foot with supporting artillery and sapper units—created an excellent impression on the colony and its inhabitants. Quartered at both Upper and Lower Fort Garry, they provided a steady source of revenue for the farmers, small merchants and the freighters who brought in supplies. The officers joined enthusiastically in the life of the colony advancing its cultural tastes almost as much as they enlivened its society. Their return to England was genuinely regretted. As Simpson had calculated, the presence of troops had subdued the Métis and put an end to their illegal trade with Americans. The soldiers' association with the people of Red River had been warm and their brilliant uniforms, military bearing and, above all, their integrity created a lasting impression on the Indians of the West.

In later years other soldiers came to Red River. Two hundred retired British soldiers came out to relieve the 6th Regiment. Under the British War Office's plan the pensioners were to be allowed to settle on grants of land and become permanent colonists who could return to arms if they were needed. Unfortunately the soldier-settlers were neither soldiers nor settlers. Their arrival at Upper Fort Garry in 1848 was a disappointment for they lacked the military bearing and discipline of the regulars who had preceded them while retaining all the chronic querulousness, the intemperate habits and the skill at evading distasteful work of the "old soldier".

Lower Fort Garry again became the residence of a governor in 1850. Not since Governor Simpson had left had there been a senior company officer resident in the post and Simpson felt this had been an omission that had loosened discipline and lowered the prestige of the company in the colony. Eden Colville, a son of Andrew Colville, Simpson's patron, was named associate Governor of Rupert's Land in 1849 and took up quarters in the Stone Fort the next August. The Colvilles liked the post and, according to Bishop David Anderson who visited them in 1852, improved it "with much taste . . . it began to wear much more of an English aspect".



Officer driving carriage with tandem team past gate of Lower Fort Garry.

During 1869-70, while the half-breeds under Louis Riel controlled the colony, Lower Fort Garry served as a rallying point for the "loyalists" who were in opposition to the provisional government of Riel and his Métis. Here a brief attempt was made to arm and train a force to wrest Upper Fort Garry from Riel's control. The Lower Fort was also "raided" once by Riel and some followers but this was only a minor incident. Riel at the time was looking for Dr. John Christian Schultz, the "loyalist" leader and Riel's most dangerous enemy in the colony. Acting on a report that Schultz was hiding in the fort, Riel paid a surprise visit and searched all rooms of the governor's residence. Since Schultz was hiding elsewhere, the only effect of the raid was to frighten an Anglican archdeacon who was a guest at the post.

When the Wolseley Expedition was sent out in 1870 to assure that the transfer of Rupert's Land to Canada was carried out peacefully, two Canadian militia battalions remained to winter at Red River. This was not the first time Canadian troops had garrisoned the colony. From 1857 to 1861 the Canadian Rifles, a British regiment composed of Canadians, had been stationed at Upper Fort Garry to protect the people from unruly bands of Sioux who had wandered across the border from Minnesota.

During the fall and winter the Second Quebec Militia Battalion was billeted at Lower Fort Garry, first living in tents outside the walls, then moving to a warehouse. They shared the area with convicts serving their sentences in Manitoba's first penitentiary. Lower Fort Garry became the provincial penitentiary in the autumn of 1870. The prisoners were housed in a special building and were kept occupied by farm work, caring for the lawns and gardens, and that traditional criminal therapy, the rock pile.

The Stone Fort was the place where Indian Treaty No. 1, the first treaty signed between the western tribes and the Canadian Government, was signed on August 3, 1871. More than 1,000 Swampy Crees and Chippewas were present for the ceremony and a guard from the Quebec Militia Battalion stood by. Among the Indians was Longbones, who had escaped not long before from the penitentiary within Lower Fort Garry. Longbones was a wanted man, with an incomplete sentence yet to serve for the scalping of his wife, and W. M. Simpson, the Indian Commissioner, demanded that he give himself up before the treaty could be signed. An eloquent speech by James McKay, an accomplished speaker in Cree as well as English, persuaded the Indians to surrender Longbones who passed through the gates of the fort to resume his imprisonment.

Lower Fort Garry is linked with the beginnings of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It was here that the first 161 officers and men reported in 1873 and on November 3 took the oath of enlistment from Lieut. Col. W. O. Smith, the temporary commissioner. The recruits from Eastern Canada together with some retiring militiamen from the Winnipeg garrison drilled and learned police procedure, riding and marksmanship during the winter. These were the original three troops of the North-West Mounted Police.

The Force's first patrol set out from its temporary headquarters at the Stone Fort in Dec. 1873, to investigate a report that whiskey traders were operating on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg. Under command of a sergeant, three constables—



Decked boats used on Lake Winnipeg anchor off the ravine at Lower Fort Garry.

each proudly representing his troop—set out for the lake in horse-drawn bobsleighs. From the mouth of the Red they moved on snowshoes through the frozen woods at last reaching a small log hut. On Boxing Day the patrol returned to report that they had arrested six whiskey traders and spilled ten gallons of liquor in the snow.

The North-West Mounted Police did not stay long at the Lower Fort. The next spring the original three troops rode out of Lower Fort Garry to join three other troops coming from the East at Fort Dufferin. On July 8, 1874, the Mounted Police—numbering 318 all ranks—began their long trek to the foothills of the Rockies.

The appearance of Lower Fort Garry has not changed greatly since it was completed. To Alexander Ross, writing "The Red River Settlement" in 1856, the Stone Fort was a contrast to Upper Fort Garry—"more secluded although picturesque, and full of rural beauty To those of studious and retired habits, it is preferred to the Upper Fort." Today, although Upper Fort Garry has long since disappeared from the Winnipeg scene, a visitor can still receive at Lower Fort Garry impressions of a peaceful and secure retreat in a setting of rare natural beauty.

The fort's buildings and scenic aspects have been preserved by the Hudson's Bay Company and, later, by the Motor Country Club of Winnipeg which was given a lease on the property in 1913 to assure proper maintenance. The club has met the responsibilities of its lease admirably through the years and kept up Lower Fort Garry with care and good taste. In 1951 the Hudson's Bay Company presented the Stone Fort as "a gift to the nation" and since then the post has been a National Historic Park. The club's lease on the property continued but provision was made for the public to visit the historic grounds. In 1963 the club's lease will terminate and Lower Fort Garry will be restored to its living mid-19th century brilliance.

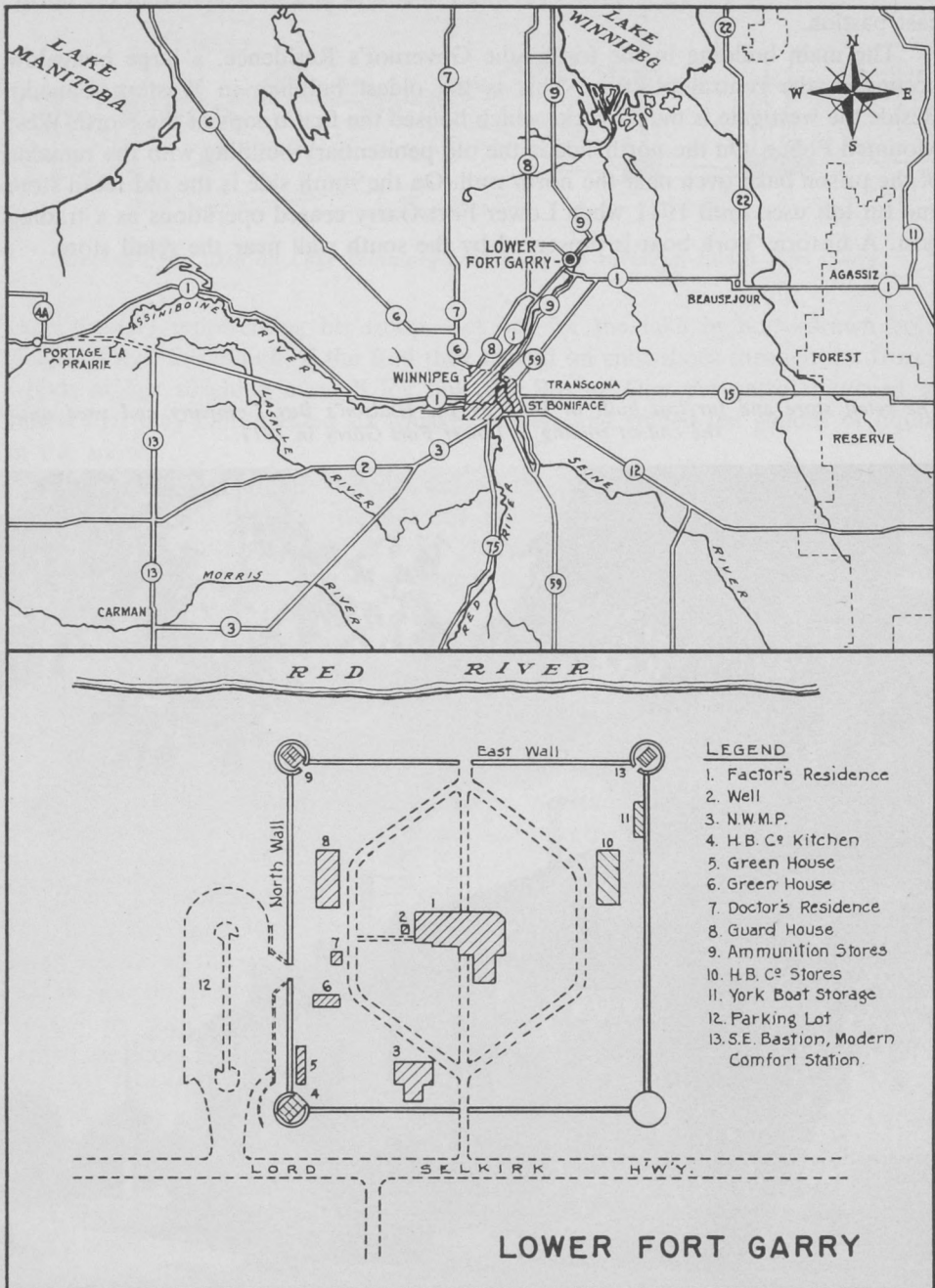
Loopholed walls, three feet thick and seven and a half feet high, enclose an area of $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres. The 55-foot-wide bastions, which are a distinct characteristic, are placed at each of the four angles of the perimeter. Each of the bastions was used for various purposes. The south-west bastion, the only one whose roof remains, served as a washhouse and cookhouse during the period British troops garrisoned

the fort and later was a storehouse. The south-east and north-west bastions have been used for ice-houses but the latter was once the bakery where hard tack was baked for the Company's northern posts. Powder and ball were stored in the north-east bastion.

The main building in the fort is the Governor's Residence, a large bungalow occupying the central position. This is the oldest building in Western Canada. Beside the west gate is the barracks which housed the first troops of the North-West Mounted Police. On the north side is the old penitentiary building with the remains of the prison bake oven near the north wall. On the south side is the old retail store and fur loft used until 1911 when Lower Fort Garry ceased operations as a trading post. A historic York boat is preserved by the south wall near the retail store.

The retail store and fur loft built in 1833 by the Hudson's Bay Company and used until the end of trading at Lower Fort Garry in 1911.





DEPARTMENT OF NORTHERN AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL RESOURCES

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITES DIVISION

